

# Educational attainment statistics

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in May 2024.  
Planned article update: May 2025.*

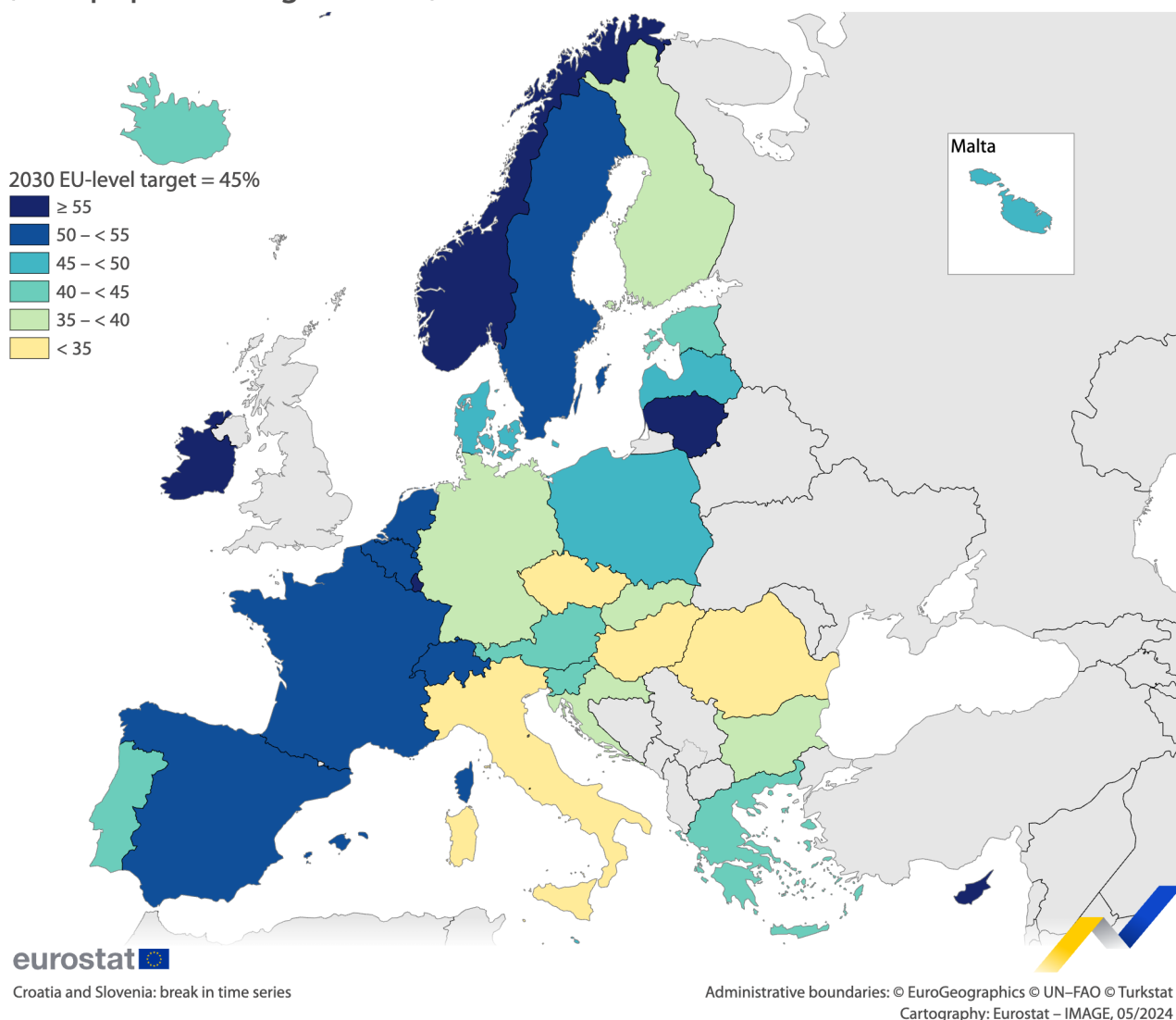
## Highlights

**" In 2023, more than 40 % of persons aged 25-34 years in the EU had completed tertiary education."**

**" In 2023, 84 % of persons aged 20-24 years in the EU had completed at least an upper secondary level of education."**

# Tertiary education attainment, 2023

(% of population aged 25-34)



This article provides recent statistics on levels of [education](#) by country, age group and sex of the population in the [European Union \(EU\)](#) , [EFTA](#) and [candidate](#) countries. The article forms part of the online publication [Education and training in the EU - facts and figures](#) .

Educational attainment is an important factor, both in the labour market and for individuals as well as society in general. Higher levels of education usually lead to higher rates of employment, higher productivity and higher lifetime earnings for individuals, and greater life satisfaction. More generally, having at least an upper secondary education is often considered as the minimum level that helps individuals to be equipped for a full participation in society and to live a fulfilling life.

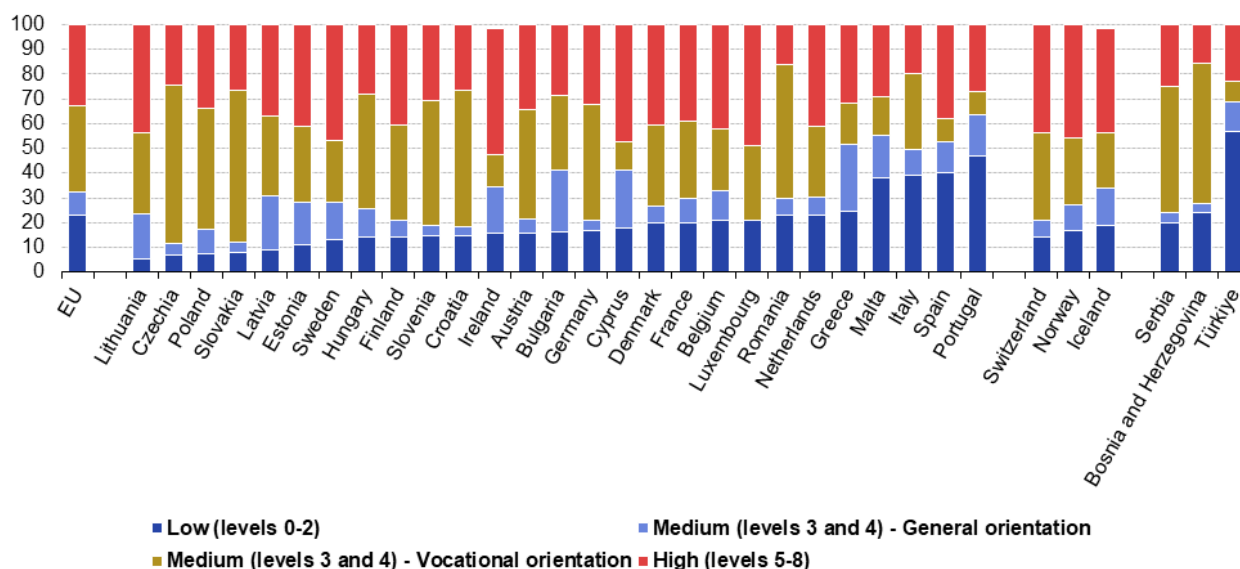
In this article three main levels of educational attainment are studied: low (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education), medium (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education) and high (tertiary education i.e., education provided by universities and other higher education institutions). Relevant [EU level targets](#) related to educational attainment are also presented.

## Distribution of the EU population by educational attainment in 2023

In 2023, 22.9 % of people aged 25-74 years in the EU had a low educational attainment level. The corresponding share was 44.5 % for medium educational attainment level (divided into 9.7 % general and 34.8 % vocational education) and 32.6 % for high educational attainment level i.e., tertiary education.

### Distribution of the population aged 25–74 by educational attainment level, 2023

(% of the population aged 25–74)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifs\_9903)

eurostat

**Figure 1: Distribution of the population aged 25–74 years by educational attainment level, 2023 (% of the population aged 25–74 years)** Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifs\_9903)

#### Educational attainment levels

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the population aged 25-74 years by educational attainment level. The three different levels of educational attainment are as follows

- less than primary, primary or lower secondary level of education ( [ISCED](#) 2011 levels 0–2; hereafter referred to as a low educational attainment level or low level of education);
- upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and 4; hereafter referred to as medium educational attainment level or medium level of education); at this level, information whether the programme had general or vocational orientation is available;
- tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5–8; hereafter referred to as a high educational attainment level or high level of education).

The distribution of the different educational attainment levels vary between the Member States as is shown in Figure 1. Lithuania, Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Latvia had the lowest shares of people with a low level of education (all less than 10 %), while Malta, Italy, Spain and Portugal had the highest (all above 35 %). This ranged from 5.4 % in Lithuania to 47.0 % in Portugal. Ireland, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Sweden reported the highest shares of people with tertiary education (over 45 %), while Romania, Italy and Czechia reported the lowest shares (all below 25 %). Overall, the share of people with higher education ranged from 16.5 % in Romania to 50.8 % in Ireland.

For the medium level of education, the proportions were lowest in Spain and Portugal (below 30 %) while they were highest in Slovakia and Czechia (above 65 %). For this educational level, a distinction into general and vocational qualifications is possible, the latter being considered as more relevant for the labour market because they are more

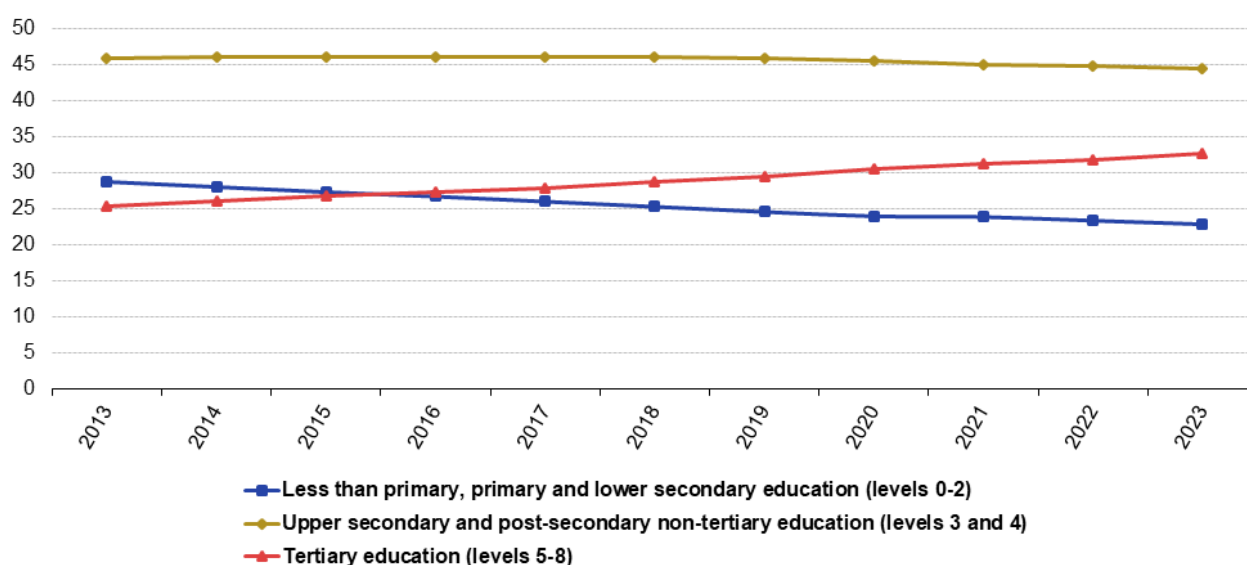
job-oriented. Looking at the orientation of the medium level qualifications, the share of people that had a qualification with vocational orientation was higher than the one with a general orientation in almost all countries. The only exceptions were Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Malta. The extent to which such qualifications prevail in a country reflects both national education systems and labour markets.

## Development of educational attainment levels over the last ten years

The development of the proportions of the different educational attainment levels from 2013 to 2023 is illustrated in Figure 2. It shows that the share of people aged 25-74 years with tertiary education has increased from 25.3 % in 2013 to 32.6 % in 2023. At the same time, the share of the population with a low level of education has decreased from 28.7 % in 2013 to 22.9 % in 2023, whereas the share of people with medium education has been relatively stable over the years, at around 45 %. The line for the proportion of people having a low level of education (0-2) crossed the one for people with tertiary education in 2015. The difference between these two lines increased since then, with 9.7 pp more people having tertiary education than a low level of education in 2023.

### Population aged 25-74 by educational attainment level, EU, 2013-2023

(% of the population aged 25-74)



Note: Break in the series in 2014 and 2021.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_lfs\_9903)

eurostat

**Figure 2: Population aged 25-74 years by educational attainment level, EU, 2013-2023 (% of the population aged 25-74 years)** Source: Eurostat (edat\_lfs\_9903)

## Educational attainment levels vary between age groups

In accordance with the overall development of educational attainment levels over time, the patterns of educational attainment levels across the population in the EU have changed significantly over time and, on average, younger people attain higher levels of education than older ones. In 2023, 82.1 % of people aged 25-54 years in the EU had attained at least an upper secondary level of education, compared with 69.4 % of those aged 55-74 years. Correspondingly, among younger people (25-54 years) it was less common to have a low educational attainment, 17.9 %, compared with 30.6 % for the older age group (55-74 years). Those with tertiary educational attainment

amounted to 38.7 % of the group aged 25-54 years and 23.2 % of the group aged 55-74 years, whereas the share of those with a medium level of education was about the same in both age groups (43.4 % and 46.2 % respectively, see Table 1).

Among the people in the EU with a medium level of educational attainment, the share of those with a vocational oriented qualification was about the same for the two age groups: 76.5 % for those aged 25-54 years and 80.7 % for those aged 55-74 years. However, these shares varied a lot between countries, from 94.0 % in Croatia for age group 25-54 years and 95.8 % in Germany for persons aged 55-74, down to 33.2 % in Cyprus for the younger and 20.0 % in Portugal for the older. Moreover, notable differences between the age groups can be observed in countries with overall low shares of vocational qualifications: in Portugal the share of vocational qualifications was more than double for the younger (41.0 % vs. 20.0 %), and in Greece the share of the younger outnumbered that of the older by a factor of 1.5 (43.0 % vs. 28.1 %). A similar but less pronounced pattern can be observed for Cyprus, Ireland and Spain. Reforms in the national education systems in favour of vocational training as well as labour market demand could explain such developments.

#### Population by educational attainment level and selected age groups, 2023

(% of the respective age population)

	25–54 years					55–74 years				
	Low (ISCED 0–2)	Medium (ISCED 3–4)	of which		High (ISCED 5–8)	Low (ISCED 0–2)	Medium (ISCED 3–4)	of which		High (ISCED 5–8)
			General orientation	Vocational orientation				General orientation	Vocational orientation	
EU	17.9	43.4	10.1	33.2	38.7	30.6	46.2	8.9	37.3	23.2
Belgium	15.3	36.6	11.0	25.6	48.1	30.0	38.1	13.6	24.5	31.8
Bulgaria	14.6	52.4	24.2	28.2	33.0	18.9	59.3	25.3	34.1	21.7
Czechia	5.9	64.8	4.9	59.9	29.3	9.3	74.4	4.3	70.1	16.3
Denmark	16.4	36.7	7.9	28.8	46.9	25.3	44.4	4.5	39.9	30.3
Germany	17.1	47.4	5.3	42.1	35.4	16.9	55.1	2.2	52.8	28.1
Estonia	12.1	46.0	16.5	29.5	41.9	9.7	51.3	18.5	32.8	39.0
Ireland	8.4	32.7	17.6	13.7	58.9	30.2	35.8	21.4	12.9	34.0
Greece	14.5	48.8	27.8	21.0	36.7	39.7	36.3	26.2	10.2	24.0
Spain	32.4	22.6	12.3	10.3	45.0	52.9	20.4	12.9	7.5	26.8
France	13.5	39.2	9.0	30.2	47.3	29.7	44.1	10.9	33.2	26.1
Croatia	7.7	60.2	3.6	56.6	32.1	24.7	56.3	3.3	52.9	19.1
Italy	29.3	45.8	11.3	34.5	24.9	53.0	34.8	8.8	26.0	12.3
Cyprus	11.7	32.8	21.8	10.9	55.5	29.8	39.2	27.8	11.4	31.0
Latvia	10.1	47.5	22.2	25.3	42.4	6.7	64.1	21.6	42.5	29.1
Lithuania	6.7	41.4	16.4	25.1	51.9	3.4	65.6	21.4	44.3	31.0
Luxembourg	15.5	27.3	.	27.3	57.1	32.8	36.1	.	36.1	31.1
Hungary	12.2	56.2	12.9	43.3	31.6	17.0	60.5	9.2	51.3	22.4
Malta	26.8	36.4	19.0	17.4	36.9	64.6	23.2	12.2	11.0	12.1
Netherlands	15.5	35.7	6.5	29.1	48.9	34.9	36.0	8.0	28.0	29.0
Austria	12.2	47.4	6.7	40.7	40.4	21.2	54.0	4.8	49.2	24.8
Poland	5.0	52.0	11.0	40.9	43.1	11.7	69.8	7.7	62.1	18.5
Portugal	32.3	33.4	19.7	13.7	34.3	69.1	15.0	11.9	3.0	15.9
Romania	19.4	59.6	7.8	51.9	20.9	28.3	62.6	5.9	56.7	9.0
Slovenia	9.1	52.6	4.7	47.8	38.4	23.2	57.3	3.0	54.3	19.5
Slovakia	6.0	62.0	4.0	58.0	31.9	11.0	71.7	4.2	67.6	17.2
Finland	10.3	45.8	8.6	37.2	43.9	19.7	44.9	3.6	41.3	35.4
Sweden	10.8	35.6	13.7	21.9	53.6	17.6	47.3	17.7	29.6	35.1
Iceland	17.0	36.5	16.5	18.3	46.5	22.2	44.6	12.2	30.9	33.1
Norway	15.5	32.5	9.7	22.8	52.0	19.5	45.4	11.2	34.2	35.1
Switzerland	12.4	38.1	6.9	31.2	49.6	17.6	48.7	6.6	42.1	33.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	15.0	65.3	4.8	60.5	19.8	37.8	53.4	3.1	50.3	8.8
Serbia	13.2	56.8	4.2	52.6	30.0	29.0	53.2	3.9	49.3	17.8
Türkiye	48.8	23.2	13.6	9.6	28.1	78.5	12.0	7.1	5.0	9.5

Note: Medium general orientation is not available in Luxembourg due to very small sample size.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifs\_9903)

**Table 1: Population by educational attainment level and selected age groups, 2023 (% of the respective age population) Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifs\_9903)**

## Policy indicators regarding educational attainment

Within the [strategic framework of the European Education Area](#) several strategic priorities for the period 2021-2030 have been decided and [seven EU level targets](#) have been agreed upon. Two indicators of educational attainment

are used for policy monitoring, namely the EU level target indicator on tertiary attainment and a complementary indicator regarding the share of people with at least an upper secondary education.

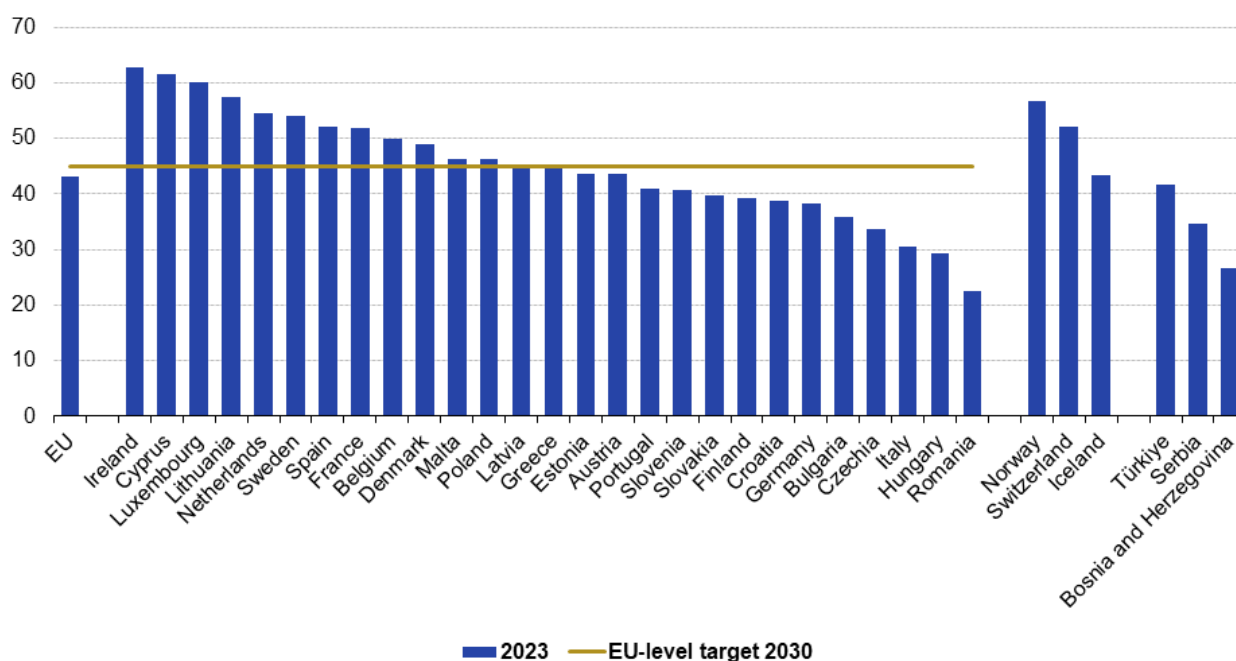
### Tertiary education is becoming increasingly important ...

Having successfully completed tertiary education is becoming more important due to the increased demand for highly skilled individuals in the labour market within the EU. Higher education plays an essential role in society by fostering innovation, increasing economic development and growth, and improving more generally the well-being of citizens. For more detailed information see the [statistics explained article on tertiary education](#).

In February 2021, the Council approved the [Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#). This resolution sets an EU level target that the share of persons aged 25-34 years with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45 %, by 2030.

Figure 3 shows the share of the population aged 25-34 years with tertiary education in 2023. Within the EU this share amounted to 43.1 %. Almost half of the EU Member States have already reached the target for 2030. The highest shares were found in Luxembourg, Cyprus and Ireland, over 60 %. By contrast, the lowest shares of people with tertiary educational attainment were observed in Romania and Hungary, where the proportion of persons with tertiary education was below 30 %.

### Population aged 25–34 with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5–8), 2023 (% of the population aged 25–34)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifse\_03)

eurostat

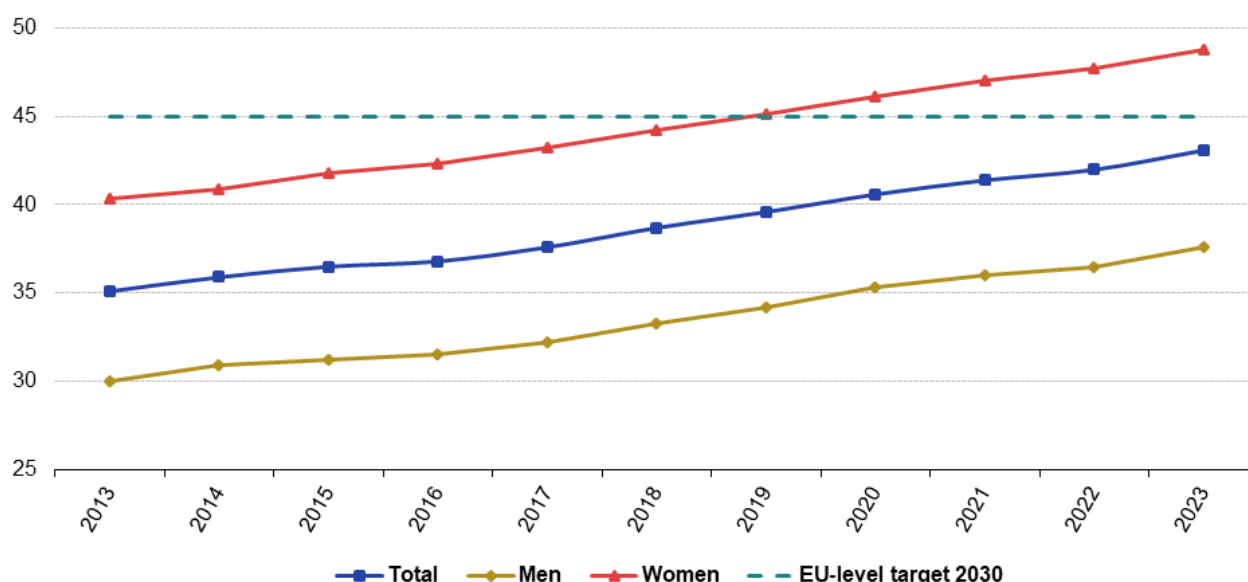
**Figure 3: Population aged 25–34 years with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5–8), 2023 (% of the population aged 25-34 years)** Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifse\_03)

### ... more women than men have tertiary educational attainment ...

For the EU as a whole, women already reached the 2030 EU level target in 2019, with 45.1 % of women aged 25-34 having completed tertiary education. In 2023 this share had risen to 48.8 %. The share of tertiary educational attainment for men in the same age group stood at 37.6 % in 2023. The proportion of men with tertiary

education has increased over the last ten years but at a slower pace than for women, leading to a slightly broader gender gap over time, namely 11.2 [percentage points \(pp\)](#) in 2023 versus 10.3 pp in 2013 (see Figure 4).

### Population aged 25-34 with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5–8), by sex, EU, 2013-2023 (% of the population aged 25–34)



Note: Break in the series in 2014 and 2021.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_lfse\_03)

eurostat

**Figure 4: Population aged 25-34 years with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5–8), by sex, EU, 2013-2023 (% of the population aged 25-34 years)** Source: Eurostat (edat\_lfse\_03)

### ... but completion of upper secondary education is also of interest for policy ...

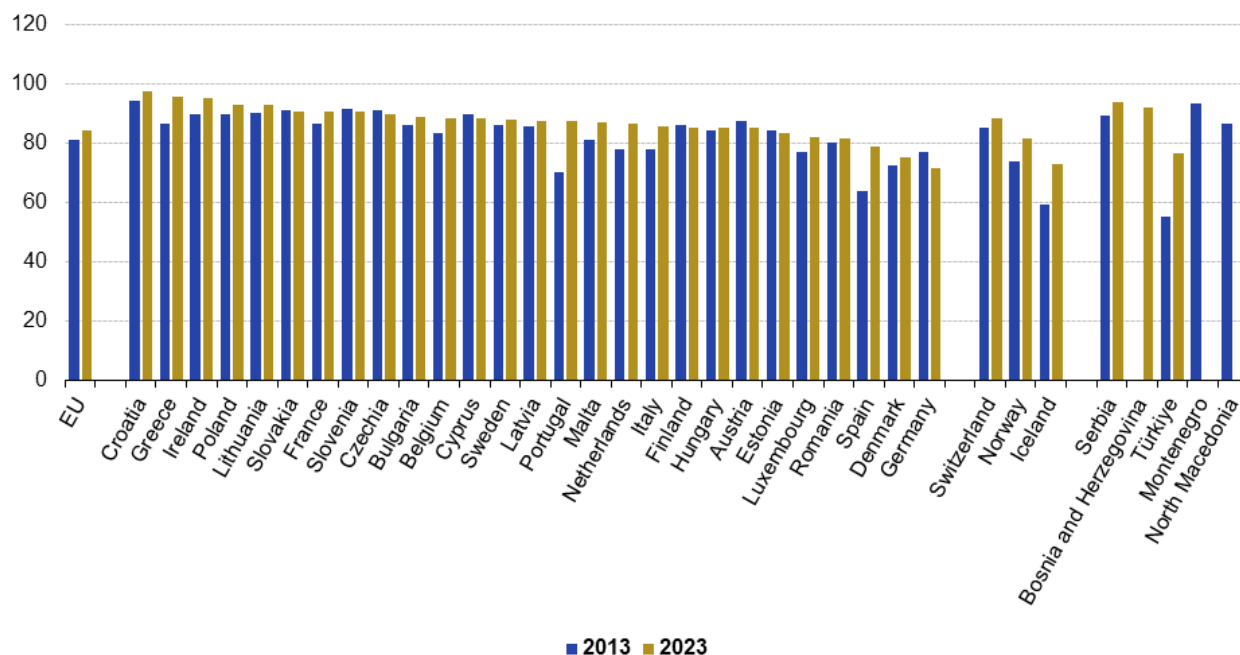
The share of people aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary qualification has been agreed as a supplementary indicator to the [EU level target](#) for [early leavers from education and training](#).

The skills and competences gained in upper secondary education are increasingly seen as the minimum credentials for a successful labour market entry as well as the basis for further learning and a fulfilling life.

Figure 5 below shows that in 2023 the average share of people aged 20-24 years with at least an upper secondary education was 84.1 % within the EU. The lowest shares among the Member States were found in Spain, Denmark and Germany, below 80 %. The highest shares were found in Croatia, Greece and Ireland where 95 % or more of people aged 20-24 years had at least an upper secondary education. Compared with 2013, this share increased in all countries except Germany, Austria, Czechia, Cyprus, Slovenia, Estonia, Slovakia and Finland. Spain and Portugal reported the largest increases, 15.2 pp and 17.2 pp respectively.



**Population aged 20–24 with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3–8), 2013 and 2023**  
(% of the population aged 20–24)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_lfse\_03)

eurostat

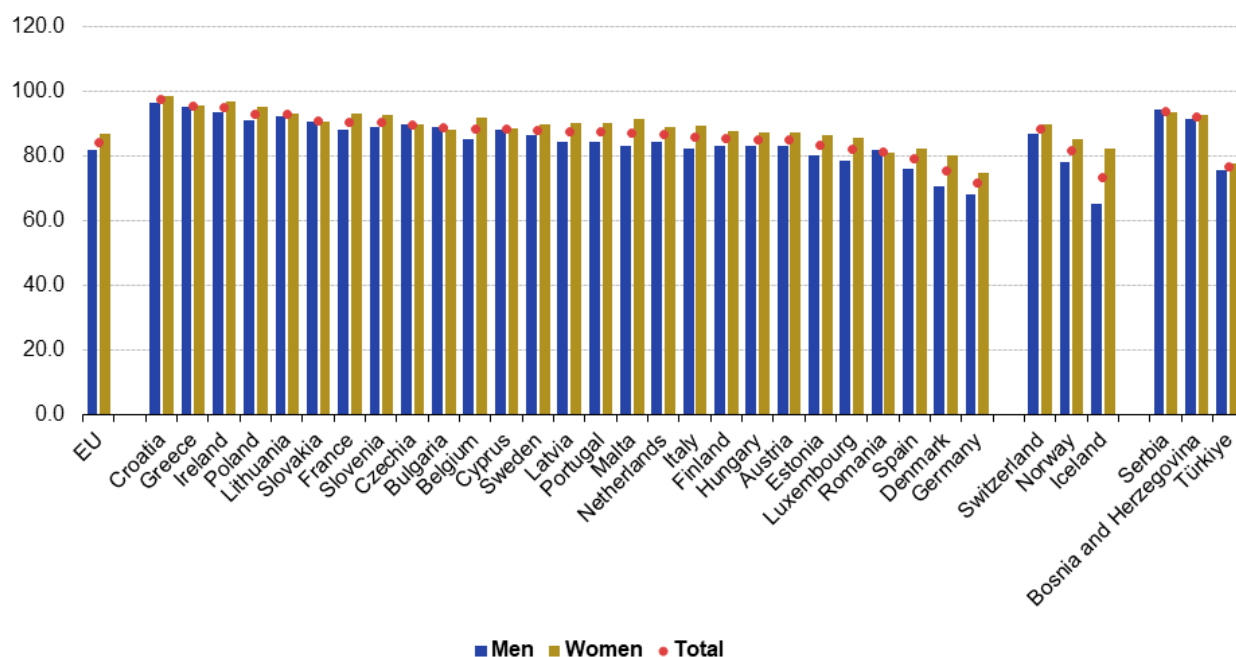
**Figure 5: Population aged 20–24 years with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3–8), 2013 and 2023 (% of the population aged 20–24 years)** Source: Eurostat (edat\_lfse\_03)

**... and more women than men have completed at least an upper secondary level of education**

A higher proportion of women reached this level of education compared with men, as the share was 86.7 % for women aged 20–24 and 81.6 % for men in the same age group, see Figure 6. The share for women was higher than for men in all Member States except in Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia. In Denmark, Malta and Luxembourg the differences between men and women were the largest, with 7 pp or more in favour of women.



## Population aged 20–24 with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3–8) by sex, 2023 (% of the population aged 20–24)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_lfse\_03)

eurostat

**Figure 6: Population aged 20–24 years with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3–8) by sex, 2023 (% of the population aged 20–24 years)** Source: Eurostat (edat\_lfse\_03)

## Source data for tables and graphs

- [Educational attainment 2024](#)

## Data sources

The EU [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#) provides statistics on educational attainment. The LFS is documented in this [background article](#) which provides information on the scope of the data, its legal basis, the methodology employed, as well as related concepts and definitions. Data on educational attainment are calculated as annual averages of quarterly data.

For data on educational attainment based on the LFS, the International Standard Classification of Education 2011 ( [ISCED 2011](#) ) is applied as from 2014. Up to 2013 [ISCED 1997](#) is used.

Eurostat's online database presents data on educational attainment for four aggregates:

- Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2)
- Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4)
- At least upper secondary education, i.e., upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3-8, ISCED 1997 levels 3-6)
- Tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5-8, ISCED 1997 levels 5 and 6)

At this level of aggregation data are comparable over time for all available countries except [Austria and Estonia](#) .

As from 2021, for ISCED levels 3 and 4, a breakdown by orientation general/vocational is available for all age

groups. Up to 2020, this breakdown is only available for those aged 15-34 years.

## Context

Educational attainment is the visible output of the education systems and forms a measure of their success. For individuals, achievement levels have a major impact, both personally and professionally, on the quality of life and job opportunities. The level of educational attainment people reach is measured according to the [International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\)](#) .

The February 2021 [Council resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European education area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#) , builds on the previous frameworks for European cooperation in education and training (ET), namely the ET2010 and ET2020 frameworks. It fixes five strategic priorities: improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all; making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all; enhancing competences and motivation among teaching professionals; reinforcing European higher education; and supporting the green and digital transitions. The document also sets out [seven EU level targets](#) , the first five of which are to be achieved by 2030. The EU level target for tertiary level attainment is that the share of persons aged 25-34 years with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45 %. One supplementary indicator complementing the EU level target on [early leavers from education and training](#) is defined as the share of people aged 20-24 years with at least an upper secondary qualification. For more information regarding early leavers see the [statistical explain article on the subject](#) .

Indicators on educational attainment – among others – are also used to reflect the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and to monitor the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) .

## Explore further

### Other articles

- [EU labour force survey statistics — online publication](#)
- [Education and training in the EU — facts and figures](#)

### Database

- [Education and training \(educ\)](#) , see:

Education and training outcomes (educ\_outc)

Educational attainment level (edat)

Population by educational attainment level (edat1)

### Thematic section

- [Education and training](#)

### Selected datasets

- [Education and training \(t\\_educ\)](#) , see:

Education and training outcomes (t\_educ\_outc)

## Methodology

### Metadata

- [Educational attainment level and transition from education to work](#) (ESMS metadata file — edat1\_esms)

### Manuals and other methodological information

- [Further methodological information on educational attainment](#)

### External links

- [European Commission — Education and training policies](#)

### Legislation

- [EU labour force survey – main features and legal basis](#)